

are made to link Zizek with Altizer, Tillich, Bonhoeffer and even Kierkegaard and Chesterton (Zizek has claimed the latter as two of the stimulants of his thought), but the connections that Kotsko forges say more about the ingenuity of his mind than Zizek's own insights. Indeed, Kotsko has written a sophisticated and knowledgeable book, but about a body of work that is perhaps best approached theologically as an over-inflated footnote to C.S. Lewis's identification of the Incarnation as a 'catastrophic historical event' (*The Problem of Pain* 1940, Centenary Press, London, p. 12).

KEITH TESTER

**SUBJECTIVITY AND BEING SOMEBODY** by Grant Gillett (*St Andrews Studies in Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Imprint Academic 2008) Pp. xxx + 286, £17.95 pbk

Subtitled 'Human Identity and Neuroethics', this book is the work of a neurosurgeon who is also a well-trained analytical philosopher and professor of medical ethics at the University of Otago, New Zealand. The argument ranges widely – so widely, that it is not always easy to know where it has got to or where it is going. And the author's style, or rather lack of it, places formidable obstacles in a text which would be difficult enough even if it had been written in English. It is, however, worth persevering to the end of the book, not only because Gillett brings together many lines of expertise and enquiry in a novel way, but also because there emerges from these dense pages a challenging vision of the human subject.

Gillett's primary thesis, if I have rightly discerned it, is this. Human beings are animals, but not *merely* animals. They are also persons, and from the first they are following a particular developmental path, the end point of which is incorporation into the world of inter-personal relations. It is only as embodied, however, that they can participate in these relations, and the human condition is that of the 'embodied subject'. Such an embodied subject has a soul – not in the sense of an immaterial entity that could be detached from the body and endure without it, but in something like the sense of Aristotle's 'form'. The soul is that which identifies the human being as somebody, by ordering his life and activities as 'mine'. The development of the human being is in the first instance cognitive, involving conceptual skills, and therefore the grasp of rule-following. However, conceptual skills are acquired only through interaction with others. Hence the moral sense – the sense of being in relations of reciprocity and accountability towards others of one's kind – is an integral part of being human.

The human being also has an individual identity: he is who he is, and not another thing. This identity is not conferred upon him by some real essence to be described in biological terms. For example, a person does not derive his identity from his biological origins in the union of two cells. His identity is in some sense the product of a continuous narrative, of which he himself is the author. Gillett spends some time attacking the views of Parfit and others on the topic of personal identity, while taking from Parfit the thought that what matters to us are continuities rather than Leibnizian principles of individuation. The relevant continuities concern the story that is accessible to me, in memory, intention, and relationships. Hence self-attribution has a central role in the life, and also in the concept, of the person. And my self-attributions are not determined by the biological processes on which my life depends but are essentially revisable, projecting both backwards in memory and forwards in intention a self-conception that evolves through my dialogue with others.

All that is summarized by Gillett in the statement that ‘a human being is... a being-in-the-process-of-becoming-among-others where those others that one develops among bring out facets of one’s own identity dependent for their expression or articulation on the being-among that supports them.’ (p. 249.) The sentence illustrates Gillett’s style, which is one of ‘Oxford analyticalese’ stirred up with a dose of Heideggerian *Hierunddasein*: a synthesis, in other words, of the two greatest crimes against the written word ever committed by philosophers.

A subsidiary aim of the book seems to be to rescue the concept of the human person from biological reductionism. On Gillett’s account we are human beings, located in human bodies and subject to biological laws. Memory, consciousness and intention are rooted in neural networks which create the electronic links between our environment and our response to it. But there is, ‘inscribed’ in the human body, a narrative of self-identity, and this narrative creates the person, not as a body, but as somebody – in other words as a node in the network of inter-personal relations, whose identity and destiny are conferred by its own self-attribution. Self-attribution opens the individual to the address of others. First-person knowledge makes the I-thou relation possible, and so sets our biological functioning within a broader framework of accountability. Gillett (rightly in my view) sees this as containing the solution to the free-will problem, and also to the philosophical problem raised by multiple personality disorder. Who I am is who I take myself to be, when speaking sincerely in the first-person case. My self-attributions, as Wittgenstein pointed out, are privileged, guaranteed by immunities to error embedded in the deep grammar of ‘I’. This mysterious feature, properly understood, is sufficient to refute biological reductionism, and to vindicate the concept of the ‘soul’, in the form that Gillett introduces it.

In the course of his discussion of free will and responsibility Gillett addresses the argument of Benjamin Libet, who famously demonstrated that the neural processes sufficient for intentional movement occur shortly before the subject reports that he has made up his mind. Libet and many others have taken this as showing that there is no free will, that ‘intention’ is merely an epiphenomenon, a helpless commentary in consciousness on events that proceed without it. That nonsense is exploded by Gillett in a few pages of effective argument. Libet’s ‘proof’, he suggests, depends upon four assumptions: that an action is a discrete bodily movement; that there is a mental event which is the cause of the act; that one can fix the time of a mental event on the basis of its reportability; and that ‘the detectable brain event is the cause of the act rather than being a reflection of preparatory moves or neural events involved in acting with intent’ (p. 112). All those assumptions, he plausibly argues, are false. In effect Libet has begged the argument in his own favour, by assuming that free choice must be an *event* in the causal chain, rather than a condition of accountability, attributed to the self-conscious subject – a condition that is ‘not located in neuro-time’ (p. 117).

It is impossible in a short review to cover all the topics raised by Gillett, who has read widely in the recent literature of both philosophy and neuroscience, and who clearly intends to produce a comprehensive synthesis of the two disciplines. In conclusion, however, it is worth raising a question about the term ‘neuroethics’ which, the subtitle suggests, is the *real* discipline that the book exemplifies. Is there such a discipline? Is there a branch of ethics that specifically concerns matters of neurology, or a branch of neurology that raises questions that are not general questions of ethics? The problematic use of brain surgery to control epileptic seizures and the worst forms of depression has certainly raised moral questions of a novel kind. Ought you to remove a terrible and distressing disability if, by doing so, you also remove the soul? But the real questions here are more metaphysical than moral: does the person remain at the end of the operation, or have you effectively destroyed him? Clearly such questions are of great concern

to Gillett, but he says nothing to convince me that there is a specific discipline of 'neuroethics' adapted to discussing them.

The point is important, I think, since it is not just philosophy but the humanities generally that are being invaded by claims made on behalf of neuroscience. My own discipline of aesthetics is now being bashed about by experts in 'neuroaesthetics', which subject has its own Institute, under Semir Zeki, at University College London, and its own journal. John Onians of East Anglia University has branded himself as a neuroart-historian, while Dartmouth College has a 'MacArthur Center for Law and Neuroscience', devoted to messing up legal reasoning by combining it with brain imaging. One by one real but non-scientific disciplines are being rebranded as infant sciences, even though the only science involved has absolutely nothing to do with their subject matter. I have no doubt that we will soon see chairs in neurotheology, neuromusicology and maybe even neurofootball and neurocooking too.

There is a very good reason to complain about this, and Gillett is well aware of it. As his argument shows, neuroscience is strictly irrelevant to understanding the nature, identity and moral predicament of the human person. Questions about the nature of the human person are in the first instance metaphysical, and no amount of brain imaging will solve them, or even help us to state them. Philosophy is a real discipline, but it is not a science. Aesthetics, criticism, musicology, law are also real disciplines. But they too are not sciences. They are not concerned with explaining some aspect of the human condition but with understanding it, according to its own internal procedures. Rebrand them as branches of neuroscience and you don't increase knowledge: you lose it. Brain imaging will not help you to analyse Bach's *Art of Fugue* or to interpret *King Lear* any more than it will unravel the concept of legal responsibility or deliver a proof of Goldbach's conjecture. It will simply propagate the newest of superstitions, which says that I am not a whole human being with both mental and physical powers, but merely a brain in a box.

Gillett's book, by a philosophically sophisticated neurosurgeon, might have helped us to understand the point, since it defends a particular kind of holism about the human being. It is all the more regrettable, therefore, that it is so atrociously written. Gillett has the vices of style that make anglophone philosophy unreadable (numbered sentences, unmemorable acronyms, bracketed qualifications, the PC feminine pronoun etc.), backed up by uncritical borrowings from continental frauds – including the psychopath Jacques Lacan, whose intellectual credentials have been definitively destroyed by Gillett's fellow neuroscientist Raymond Tallis, as well as by Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont in their *Intellectual Impostures*. There is much to be learned from Gillett; would that he could teach it, therefore, in natural language, in his own voice, saying it straight.

ROGER SCRUTON

**WHOSE GOD? WHICH TRADITION?: THE NATURE OF BELIEF IN GOD**, edited by D.Z. Phillips (*Ashgate Publishing*, Aldershot and Burlington, VT 2008). Pp. vii + 173, £55.00 hbk

Perhaps the last book edited by the late D.Z. Phillips (d. 25 July 2006), this volume consists of papers delivered at the 2005 annual Claremont Conference on the Philosophy of Religion, held at Claremont Graduate University in California. Although of course very well known through his own work as a—if not *the*—leading exponent of a Wittgensteinian approach to the philosophy of religion, Phillips's contribution to the field has been latterly enhanced by a steady stream of edited or co-edited volumes consisting of the proceedings of these Claremont